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Prologue

Hi, everyone!!! Thank you so much for opening this book! ~^^

You don't know how much I appreciate it!!!

Please vote and comment! ~^^

The warm breeze, accompanied by a few rustling leaves, ruffled Spottedpaw's ear-fur as she gazed upon the hunting grounds of StarClan for the first time.

"Incredible, isn't it?" A voice behind her made her whirl around.

The cat who had been speaking was a sleek-furred light brown tabby she-cat with bright blue eyes. "Spottedpaw, right?" she continued, letting her blue gaze rake Spottedpaw from ears to paws.

"Yes." Spottedpaw shuffled her paws, looking at the ground in a mixture of awe and respect.

"Raise your head, young one. After all, you too will soon become an important part of the Clans as well."

When Spottedpaw lifted her head, the she-cat gave her a soothing lick and leaped down the hill in several graceful bounds, pausing to lap at a spring.

"Wait!" Spottedpaw bounded after her. "What's your name?"

The she-cat lifted her head, water drops sparkling on her whiskers.

"My name is Dappleleaf."

"Why have you come to me?" Spottedpaw was eager to ask questions. "Have you seen my mother, Sparkfire...?"

"Of course I have." Dappleleaf looked at her with warmth in her eyes. "In fact, she spoke to me before I came here; she told me to tell you she is very proud of you."

Spottedpaw's heart skipped a beat. "Really?" She paused. "What prophecy do you have to tell me?"

"Not much, really." Dappleleaf was careful not to scare the apprentice. "Just this:

"The cats bearing the names of our greatest ancestors have betrayal in their paths..." She lowered her mew to a whisper. "When you find them, be careful, as every choice they make shadows the fate of the Clans."

"Dappleleaf," Spottedpaw began. "Will you only be guiding my paws when I share with StarClan?"

"No. They sent me to introduce you to our hunting grounds." She purred at the dumbfounded look on Spottedpaw's face. "The main cat you will meet with is my former apprentice, Fernpaw."

She stepped aside, and a smaller cat with a light gray pelt studded with stars looked at Spottedpaw. They were about the same height, and Spottedpaw found a curiosity inside of her to become friends with this cat. Eagerness glimmered in the depths of her emerald eyes, as well as a newfound interest as she too looked her up and down, just like Dappleleaf.

"Hi." Fernpaw spoke carefully. "I'm Fernpaw. What's your name?"

"I'm Spottedpaw," the tortoiseshell replied.

She couldn't help pitying the apprentice; judging from the stars glittering in her fur and the way she looked like she was lit from the inside, it looked like she had joined StarClan before she had received her full name.

"I'll be like, what, your mentor when you share with us?" A note of enthusiasm had appeared in her voice. "But sometimes you'll share with other cats, so don't be too surprised when I'm too tired to come and some other cat comes. I don't know who."

"Um...okay?" Spottedpaw said confusedly. "If you're too tired...you don't come?"

Dappleleaf gave Fernpaw a sharp nudge, but the apprentice ducked out of the way.

"Sorry. I think I told you a secret." She smirked. "I'm, like, so sorry. I would, like, totally appreciate it if you like, totally, didn't tell anyone the secret. That was so totally not sarcasam."

"Okay?" Spottedpaw pulled a face. "Continue, please."

Fernpaw shot a pointed look at Dappleleaf. "Can you go away?"

Dappleleaf rolled her eyes, mouthed 'Good luck' to Spottedpaw and padded away until the outline of her slender figure blended in to the horizon.

Fernpaw watched, and finally turned to Spottedpaw, whisking her tail. "Ask me anything you want."

"How...did you join StarClan?" Spottedpaw finally muttered.

Fernpaw had been washing her ears and didn't stop, but Spottedpaw thought she saw a glimmer of sadness had appeared in her eyes. Her posture drooped slightly, the flicking tail had laid flat on the ground.

"Our leader gave me to WindClan in exchange for two of my Clanmates who were being held hostage." Spottedpaw noticed she left out the name of her leader. "I sacrificed myself for all of our Clanmates who were being held captive so they could escape WindClan." Fernpaw's jaw clenched. "But then my sister took a WindClan mate. The cat who killed me!" Grief shone clearly in her eyes. "She made the biggest mistake that cost her life. He lured her in...they had kits...and he killed her."

"Spottedpaw! Spottedpaw!" Her mentor's voice rang through her mind. "Spottedpaw! It's time to go!"

She was reluctunt to leave; but when she raised her head to meet Fernpaw's eyes, there was a calm acceptance in them. "I see it is time for you to go. I wish you a safe journey back to the ThunderClan camp, may we meet at the next half-moon."

When Spottedpaw prepared to leave, Fernpaw gave her one last farewell.

It wasn't the type of farewell she had expected; instead, it had been a single repetition of Dappleleaf's prophecy:

"The cats bearing the names of our greatest ancestors have betrayal in their paths. When you find them, tell them to be careful, as every choice they make shadows the fate of the Clans."

Chapter 1

"Lilykit, catch!" Leopardkit tossed the moss ball to Lilykit, who swiftly raced after it and hooked it out of the air with her claws.

"Dovekit!" Lilykit called to her sister. She threw the moss ball, and Dovekit, a pale gray she-kit, reared up on her hind legs in an attempt to snatch it, but it flew precisely over her head, into the paws of Lionkit, who immediately picked it up.

His spirits had been low until that very moment; it flared as he felt a surge of triumph in having grabbed the ball from the she-kits.

Tigerkit, his littermate, weaved in front of Mistkit eagerly. "Here, Lionkit!"

Lionkit tossed it, and at the last second Leopardkit dived in front of Tigerkit, snatching the moss-ball away from her brothers.

Lionkit scowled. "Ashkit, move in front of Lilykit. Redkit, close in on Mistkit!"

The two tom-kits obeyed, slinking in front of their sisters.

Lilykit huffed, slipping in front of Ashkit as he reared to cover her height.

Leopardkit tossed it to Dovekit, who turned around and passed it to Lilykit.

Lilykit whisked it to Mistkit, who took one look at her two brothers looming threateningly above her, let out a squeak, and began to run.

Lionkit watched in horror as she began to run towards the warriors' den, dodging between cats' legs and sliding under tails.

Each time she glanced back at her brothers who were pursuing her,

her paws churned at the ground even faster, and eventually she bumped into a pale gray flank.

Hailwing looked down at her, eyes narrowed and tail lashing, and then relaxed as he realized it was his own kit. "Hello, Lilykit," he purred. "What are you doing in front of the warriors' den?"

Mistkit froze.

Lionkit wasn't sure if she froze because of Hailwing's first hostile stance or because of the fact that her brothers were preparing themselves to pounce on her.

When they leaped, Mistkit ducked behind Hailwing, and the two kits bundled into their father.

"What are you doing, Ashkit, Redkit?" Hailwing asked.

Redkit fluffed up his tortoiseshell fur and gazed up at him with earnest green eyes. "We're playing moss-ball. Right now, Mistkit has the the ball."

"Is that true?" Hailwing tipped his head at his daughter.

Mistkit nodded. "Yes."

"Hey, Hailwing." A dark gray tom Lionkit immediately recognized as his father, Spiketuft, looked at the Clan deputy with disgust in his icy blue eyes.

"Greetings, Spiketuft." Lionkit could tell that the two tomcats weren't good friends by the way Hailwing spoke carefully. "Haven't you got a patrol to do? We need all our warriors."

Spiketuft flicked his tongue like a snake. "I do have a patrol." His voice was just as cold as his eyes, Lionkit remarked to himself. "But I do have one thing to tell you about..."

"Don't just stand around here, Spiketuft. Just tell me." There was no expression on Hailwing's face, for the sake of his kits who were standing just in front of the two cats.

"I could say the same for you, so called Clan *deputy,*" Spiketuft snarled.

Hailwing parted his jaws and closed them again, looking like he'd like to claw Spiketuft's ears off.

"Anyways. Any kit would have been punished for being this close to the warriors' den. Don't favor your kin." The dark gray tom's breath billowed out.

"I'm not," Hailwing retorted. "Don't you have kits of your own, Spiketuft?"

Spiketuft let out a small hiss. "That is none of your business, Hailwing, but I'll give you a tip of what to expect. Tigerkit is doing excellently, I have great plans for him in the future. Leopardkit has a temper...she's not that good with dealing with things that dismiss StarClan. Lionkit is growing just the way I shape him, and under my influence, he will become a powerful warrior worthy of StarClan's blessing." He paused. "Now that I've given you some information, perhaps you should give me some kind of expectation of your own kits."

"That's none of your business," Hailwing snapped.

Spiketuft looked genuinely hurt. "But I told you..."

"That doesn't mean I have to tell you," the Clan deputy said warningly.

"Go now. I have a patrol to do." He looked at all three kits with none of the affection he had showed Mistkit a few moments before, and stalked away.

Spiketuft lifted his head to watch Hailwing go. "It's not over, Hailwing," he muttered. "It'll never be."

Mistkit ran away, Ashkit and Redkit furiously chasing her, with Mistkit expertly weaving between the paws of cats while her brothers skidded at such a high speed that they couldn't prevent themselves from crashing into cats.

Lionkit wondered if Spiketuft had meant what he had said about him; was he really going to become a powerful warrior, like the lions he had been named after?

As he watched the younger kits play, he couldn't help curling his lip. "How long are they going to play warrior and prey?"

Leopardkit swatted at him. "When we were younger, all you wanted to do was play tag." There was a teasing glint in her amber eyes.

Lionkit couldn't meet her gaze, suddenly feeling self-conscious. "Well, I was younger than them," he grunted. "Shouldn't they be able to control themselves by their age?"

"Yeah. Are they Clan-born or kittypets?" Tigerkit scoffed.

Leopardkit fixed Tigerkit with a ferocious amber glare. "Don't refer to our Clanmates like that! StarClan wouldn't like that!"

"StarClan?" Tigerkit scowled. "Just a bunch of made-up stories to get the kits to behave. But I'm not going to believe them. Why should I believe a bunch of dead cats who have done nothing for me?"

Leopardkit gaped. "You don't believe in StarClan?"

"Obviously not." Tigerkit shrugged, like it wasn't a big deal. "Like I said before, why should I believe a bunch of dead cats who have done nothing for me?"

"If you don't believe in StarClan, perhaps you should *get out*," Leopardkit hissed.

"And why should I?" Tigerkit shot back.

"Perhaps," Leopardkit mewed silkily, "Because if you don't believe in StarClan, you'll get exiled from ThunderClan. Do you want that?"

Dovekit, who had been listening in on their conversation, padded towards them and dipped her head politely. "I heard it's true, Tigerkit," she mewed, "My mother's friend, Cloudstorm, got exiled when she voiced her doubts about StarClan."

Tigerkit looked faintly worried for a moment, and then it disappeared from his face. "Come on! When was that? Surely things have changed by now."

"That was a...few moons before we were born." Leopardkit's voice went into a low octave.

"Oh." For a second, Lionkit thought he had gulped. "Well, Spiketuft told me, so it must be true if he said so."

Leopardkit gaped again. "Spiketuft told you? Our father?"

"Who else would he be?" Tigerkit sniffed, his arrogance immediately returning.

"Well, you can't be a true warrior if you don't believe in StarClan," the mottled golden tabby flashed back. "That's what *Rosepetal* told *me*."

"Now where did you hear that nonsense?" the golden-and-black tabby tom yawned, his tail twitching with irritation.

"Rosepetal told *me*." Leopardkit was flaring up, Lionkit realized, and there was no going back once she got her fur ruffled. "I had a dream, really!"

"A prophecy? Who believes in those stupid things?" Tigerkit snorted. "Why is every cat talking about boring StarClan stuff these days?"

"I had a dream sent by StarClan!" Leopardkit hissed, flattening her ears. "There was a light brown tabby she-cat and a light gray she-cat with stars in their fur! She told me a prophecy!"

"Really?" Tigerkit seemed unconvinced. "Prophecy-shmophecy."

Leopardkit dropped into a crouch, narrowing her eyes. "I want to shred you."

"I know you do," he replied. "Then shred me." There was a moment's pause, and then he looked at her innocently with round eyes. "Why aren't you shredding me?"

Leopardkit had gotten up from her posture. "Well," she sighed gustily, "A good warrior doesn't shred her brother."

"That's what I thought," Tigerkit snickered.

Lionkit watched his squabbling littermates and looked away. He tried his best not to get involved in their arguments, but this time he seemed to have caused one.

Well, before it erupted into a heated debate about whether or not StarClan existed.

The discussion was just about closing now, with both kits shouting at each other.

He reflected that with both kits screeching, it wasn't closing.

What he had meant before was that he had hoped it would be closing by now.

"Well, you're a mouse-brain!" Leopardkit was saying hotly. "Go to Frostvision and Spottedpaw and ask *them* if StarClan is real!"

"Obviously they will," Tigerkit replied. "But what if they lie?"

"True medicine cats don't lie," Leopardkit snarled.

"Are you saying they aren't true medicine cats?" Tigerkit challenged.

"Did they lie yet?" Leopardkit asked.

"Well...no," Tigerkit admitted.

"And who did you say told you this absurd information?"

"Spiketuft."

"He's a pile of fox dung." Leopardkit flicked her tail. "I'd much rather listen to Rosepetal, because *she* always tells the truth."

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Lionkit looked longingly towards the apprentices' den.

Sure, he and his littermates would be made apprentices soon, but his best friend was in there.

Pinepaw was a golden-brown tom, and his brother, Thistlepaw, whom Leopardkit secretly liked, was a gray-and-white tom.

Fawnpaw padded out; she was a beautiful light brown she-cat with milky white spots and deep green eyes. Pinepaw came out next, his amber eyes shining lovingly.

Fawnpaw stopped first, eyes gleaming with welcome. "Hi, Lionkit!"

He winced at her reference to him as a kit.

Clearly she noticed, as she dipped her head apologetically.

"Lionkit." Pinepaw dipped his head coolly at him.

"Hi, Pinepaw," Lionkit said eagerly.

"Pinepaw! What are you doing there with Lionkit?" A dark gray figure padded over.

"Lionkit." Spiketuft nodded a curt greeting to his son. He turned to Pinepaw. "Is he bothering you?"

"No," Pinepaw said quickly. "Just stopped to say hi."

"I see." Spiketuft's eyes glittered. "I can't have you playing games with kits, Pinepaw. It would cause a downfall on my image."

And how is that going to help the Clan? Lionkit silently demanded. *Are you going to save ThunderClan with your 'perfect image'?* He noticed that he was staring.

Spiketuft twitched his tail. "Got anything to say, Lionkit?"

Yes, plenty! Lionkit bit back the words. "No, I was just curious."

"Be careful where you tread your paws, Lionkit. Curiosity can lead to dangerous situations." Spiketuft's blue eyes raked him ears to

tail.

"Okay." Lionkit wrapped his tail around his paws, trying to look obedient, but silently fuming.

"Pinepaw, come on. I got a training session for you," Spiketuft said, turning to his apprentice.

The golden-brown tom looked disappointed, but said nothing.

Lionkit turned to go, and Pinepaw's voice rang out. "But that's boring. Can't I do it with some other apprentice?"

Spiketuft stopped mid-walk. "I thought it might be good for you to do it with Fawnpaw, Pinepaw. Or you can just clear the dirty bedding, if you like."

Pinepaw brightened. "Oh, thank you, Spiketuft!"

Then a light brown she-cat padded over, green eyes anxious. "Spiketuft."

He looked at her. "Petalfall. I assume you're here because of something that concerns Fawnpaw?"

Petalfall looked a little surprised. "I'm surprised you guessed, Spiketuft. But yes, Fawnpaw and I were hunting earlier, and she fell from a high branch while trying to catch a pigeon."

The light brown she-cat described how apprentice and mentor had gone out in early morning to catch some prey, and Fawnpaw had attempted to leap up and snag the pigeon out of mid-air, but failed, landing precariously on a high branch, gaining her balance and then the branch snapped, plummeting Fawnpaw down to the ground below.

"I don't believe this," Pinepaw said, shaking his head in disbelief as Petalfall finished. "Fawnpaw could always do the most massive leaps!"

"Yeah," Lionkit agreed, remembering the times when they had all been kits, they had often played games where the kit who could

leap the farthest was the winner. Fawnpaw had always won; in a result she loved them.

Spiketuft's gaze hardened as it rested on his son. "Keep your tail out of this," he warned.

And why should I? He silently yowled.

"And why should I?" he demanded, the words slipping out of his mouth.

"What did you just say?" Spiketuft asked, snapping his head up.

Lionkit bristled. He wasn't going to back down now. "And why should I? Who are you to give me orders, when you've only been the faintest shadow in my life?"

Spiketuft growled. "Do you really want to start this?"

"Yes." Lionkit lashed his tail.

For a moment, Spiketuft looked like he wanted to spring onto Lionkit and tear him into bits.

Then he relaxed, tail swishing. "I see you inherited my stubornness, Lionkit. For that reason, I won't punish you." He padded away, signaling for Pinepaw to follow him.

The golden-brown tom mouthed 'Bye' to him and raced off in the pawsteps of his mentor.

Lionkit stayed where he was, seething as he unglazed the situation. "Did he say I was like him?" he fumed.

Tipping his head up to the sky, he thought, *StarClan, if you're so great, why don't you realize how bad Spiketuft's nature is?*

A flash at the corner of his eye caught his attention.

A slender cream-furred she-cat with brown tabby patches was leaping onto the Highledge; she threw back her head and let out a yowl.

"May all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the Highledge for a Clan meeting!"

Lionkit felt a flash of excitement.

This was it.